



History of Louisville's Acme Mine

Overview and Years of Operation: According to several sources, the Acme Mine was in operation between 1888 and 1928. It was located at the intersection of Roosevelt and Hutchinson in Louisville. Although it was not the only mine to operate within what were historically the town limits, it can legitimately be considered to have been the primary mine in Louisville due to its central location and its many years of operation. Hundreds of miners worked at this mine. Without the Acme Mine, it is possible that Louisville would not have been able to survive as a town.

The following undated photo, believed to predate 1901, was taken from the top of the Acme mine dump, looking west. The street that would become Hutchinson is in the distance going towards the west. The photo shows, from the left, the trestle, tippie, water tank, engine house, boiler house with smokestacks, fan house, and office.



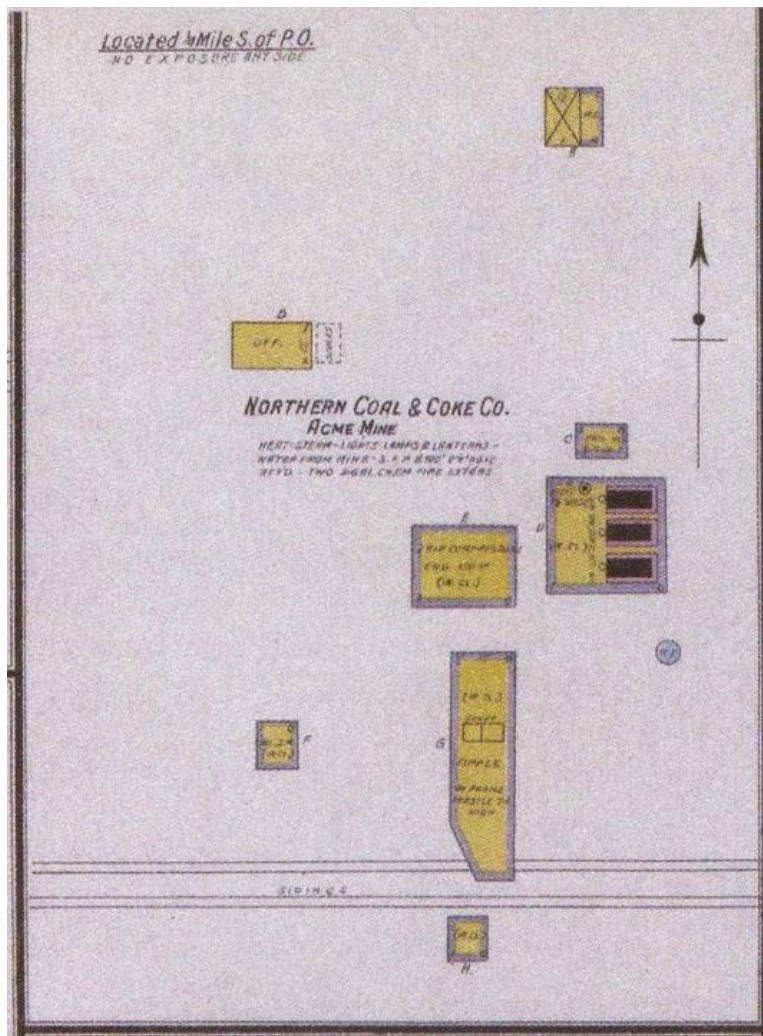
The Acme Mine was just the second successful coal mine operation in the Louisville area. (The first successful mining operation had been the Welch Mine east of the railroad tracks, which had led to the founding of Louisville in 1878.) Louisville's very first residential areas

understandably had been developed in close proximity to that first mine. With the success of the Acme Mine, John Connell developed the Acme Place subdivision in 1893, and this action extended Louisville's boundaries farther to the south and west.

Many of those who worked at the Acme Mine in its earliest years were of English heritage. Some had even been coal miners in England, and brought with them their knowledge of coal mining practices (and strong pro-labor views).

Tonnage Removed and Depth of Mine: According to Carolyn Conarroe's *Coal Mining in Colorado's Northern Field*, the Acme produced 1,729,282 tons of coal and its shaft was 186 feet in depth. According to a few sources, a second vein started to be worked at a new level starting in about 1894. According to a 1975 oral history interview with Henry "Rico" Zarini (1889-1982), the mine was worked first at 90 feet and then at 185 feet in depth.

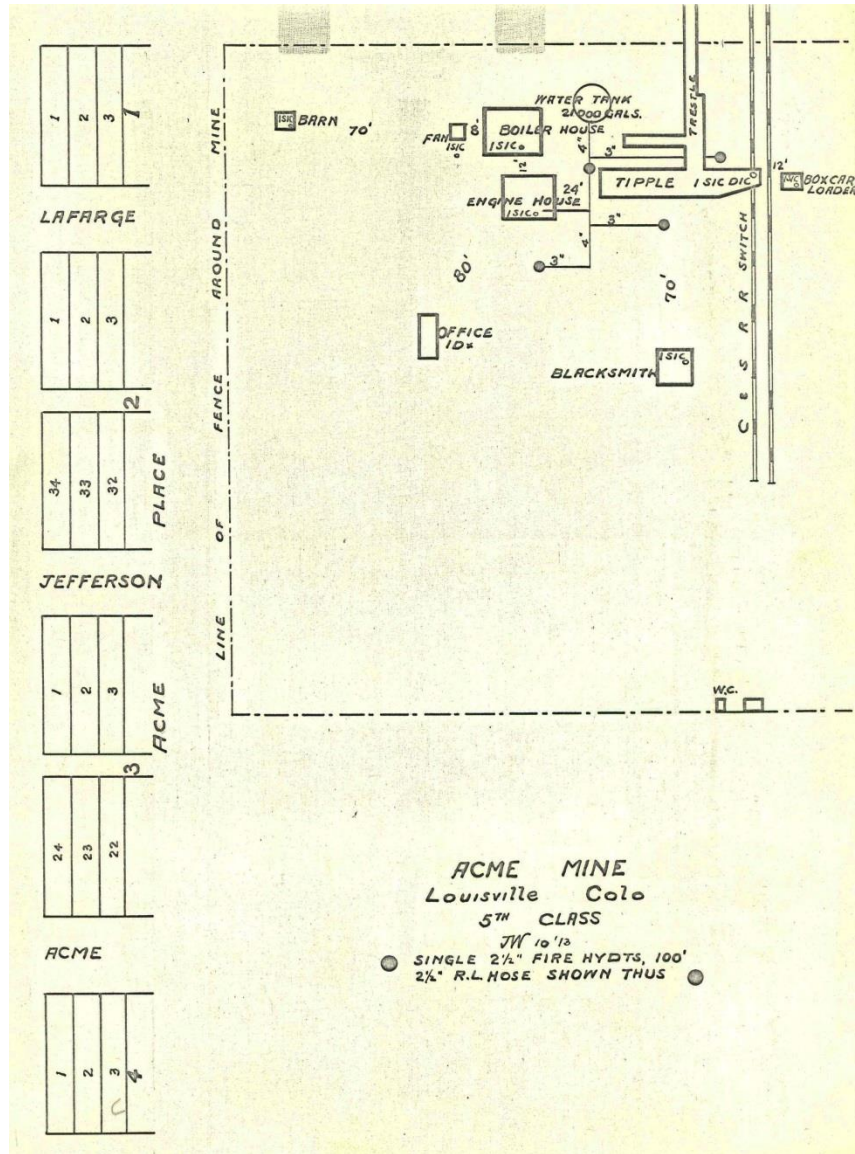
Maps of Acme Mine Buildings: The following maps show the mine buildings and their relation to one another. This map is from the 1908 Sanborn fire insurance map for Louisville.



This excerpt of the 1909 Drumm’s Wall Map of Louisville shows the tipple and boiler house, the mine dump, and the Acme railroad spur that was also used by the Grain Elevator nearby to the east:



The following map of the Acme Mine buildings is from the collection of the Louisville Historical Museum. (Unlike the other views, on this one “north” is to the left.)



Owners/Operators: This property is believed to have been acquired by Joseph Donley and James Hood. Donley and Hood sold 40 acres to the Acme Coal Mining Company in 1891.

The Acme Coal Mining Company was incorporated in 1889 with six directors:

- Lyman Andrews, who operated the business Andrews & Chambers with John S. Chambers on Front Street, then operated the Louisville Mercantile company with him.
- John S. Chambers, who was the business partner of Lyman Andrews and was married to Marybeth Chambers.
- Marybeth Chambers, who was married to John Chambers and who bought and sold a great deal of property in Louisville. (In 1896, she sued John Chambers for divorce, but her suit was denied and she did not successfully divorce him until 1910.)

- John Connell, who was born in 1861, lived in Louisville at the time of the 1885 Colorado state census, and went on to become a Denver-based coal mine operator.
- Thomas Carlton, who was born in 1824 in Cumberland, England. English census records show that he was a “colliery viewer,” which was a position similar to that of a foreman. The Carlton family immigrated to the US in the 1870s. By 1880, Tom Carlton was a mining engineer in Gold Hill in Boulder County, and by 1885, he was living in Louisville with his family. Records indicate that he was a preacher for Louisville’s English settlers who met in private homes prior to the building of the Methodist Church and that he personally raised \$800 for the building. He died in January 1892, not long after the death of his wife and shortly before the death of his son, David.
- David Carlton, who was the son of Thomas Carlton. He was born in 1848 in Cumberland, England. He died in 1892.

Records indicate that significant financing for the Acme Mine came from Isaac L. Bond. Bond was a prominent businessman in Boulder and served as mayor of Boulder from 1891 to 1893. He also had extensive mining interests.

Records indicate that the United Coal Company owned and operated the Acme Mine starting in 1893. (References to the “Louisville Coal Mining Company” as a one-time owner of the Acme Mine could not be established as being accurate.)

In 1901, Northern Coal & Coke Company took over ownership and operations, records show. (Photos showing this name on the roof of the Acme tibble are therefore presumed to date from 1901 or after.)

In 1911, Rocky Mountain Fuel Company acquired the mine and was the owner/operator of the Acme Mine until the mine closed in 1928. Rocky Mountain Fuel Company continued to own the property for many years.

Location and Associated Buildings: This mine was located at approximately the intersection of Roosevelt Ave. and Hutchinson St. in Louisville. The shaft was located on the southwest corner of that intersection with the tibble over it. Some associated buildings were located on the north side of Hutchinson. Acme Mine structures and features are believed to have included the following.

- A primary building was the tibble, from which mine cars were brought up the shaft and “tipped” to load coal into railroad cars. The mine shaft extended into the ground from this building. A cage in the shaft transported miners in and out of the mine and brought up coal cars filled with coal.

- The Acme railroad spur, also called the Acme Switch, extended from the main railroad line westward all the way to the end of Lincoln Avenue. The Louisville Grain Elevator was built to be parallel to, and to use, the Acme railroad spur.
- A boxcar loader by the tipple and the railroad spur is identified on the Acme Mine map. This may have included a mechanized conveyor for filling railroad boxcars with coal.
- A trestle carried coal cars filled with dirt, rock, and unusable coal to the mine dump.
- The mine dump was located to the east of the tipple, in the middle of Main Street and what is now the Elks Club parking lot between Roosevelt Avenue and Main Street.
- The water tank supplied water for the boiler house.
- The boiler house was the building that contained boilers, which provided steam pressure to move machinery. Coal was likely burned to boil the water to create steam. Photos show that at the Acme Mine, this building had three smokestacks. Smokestacks were needed above a boiler room in order to get rid of smoke.
- The engine house is believed to have been the building that housed the steam-powered engine that raised and lowered the cage.
- The fan house forced air into the mine for ventilation.
- A small office building was also on site.
- The blacksmith building was where the mine blacksmith worked, presumably on making, repairing, and sharpening mining tools.
- Mines in the Louisville area used mules to pull coal cars, with the mules being stabled down in the mine. However, the presence of a barn on the Acme property that is said to have been for stables suggests that there was a need to stable mules (or horses) aboveground.
- A fence enclosed the complex.

Photos of Mine Buildings: The following photos show the different buildings of the Acme Mine.

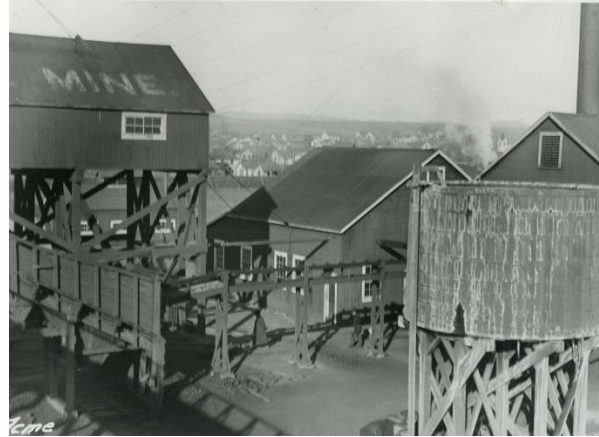
The following photo from pre-1901, which was taken from the Acme Mine dump, shows the tipple and trestle, water tank, engine house, and boiler house.



This photo shows a similar view, but apparently after the Northern Coal & Coke Company acquired the Acme Mine in 1901, because of the sign that has been added to the roof. Why the boiler house has two instead of the three smokestacks shown in the other photos is not known.



The following photo, also from after 1901, has a view looking northwest and shows the tipple, engine house, water tank, and boiler house.



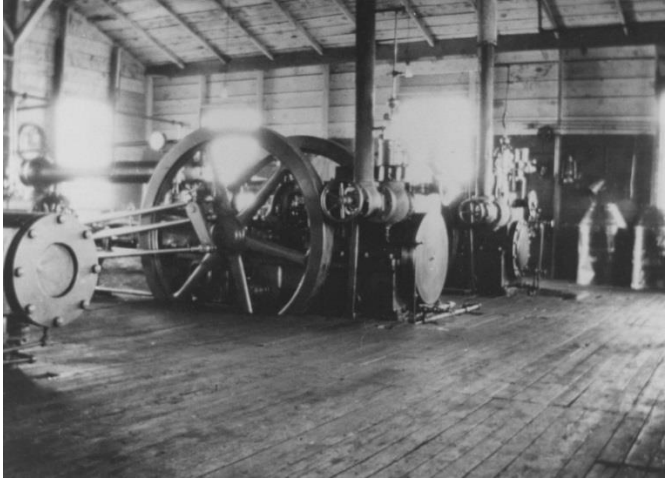
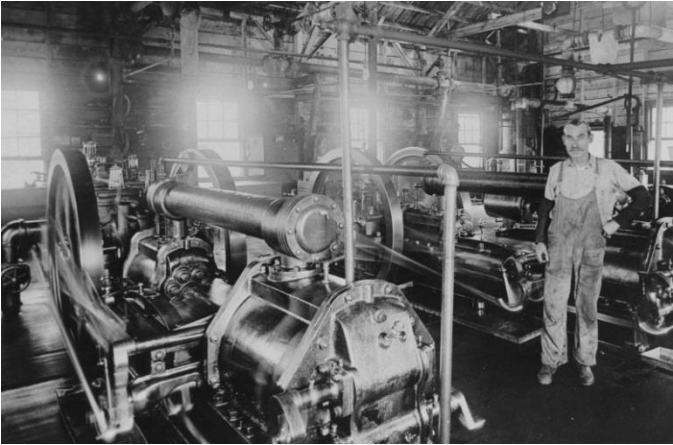
The following photo from after 1901 shows the tipple and trestle, and a rail car on the Acme railroad spur.



The following photo has a view looking east and shows the engine house, boiler house behind it with three smokestacks, fan house, and the Louisville Grain Elevator in the distance.



These are two interior photos identified as being from the Acme Mine. The man in the first photo has been identified as Emanuel Smith, a longtime English-born engineer at the Acme.



This photo shows the result of the efforts of the coal miners: a rail car filled with large chunks of coal from the Acme Mine. It is dated 1917. The photographer wrote on the photo, "We are doing our bit for Uncle Sam."



Mine Practices at the Acme Mine: According to a 1975 oral history interview with Henry “Rico” Zarini (1889-1982), all of the mines had to pump out water due to the high levels of ground water in the area. He stated that at the Acme, a 6-to-8 inch stream of water was pumped out almost continuously.

A newspaper account from a 1932 issue of the *Louisville Times* was reprinted in the *Times* on 4/4/1990. The article described a 1932 interview with Clement V. Epley, who had worked at the Acme Mine. Epley was then about 65 years old.

Epley began to work at the Acme Mine in the 1890s, working “on top” sawing mine props by hand. He earned \$2.50 a day. The article went on:

The system then in vogue was for the miner to order a prop of the length needed. Epley would mark the miner’s check number on the order, and the prop would be delivered at night to the place needing it.

Timber was freighted by team from up Coal Creek Canyon, 30 miles away. It was a big day’s trip delivering a load of mine timber. . . .

The Acme Mine then started work at 7 o’clock mornings; there was a half hour rest at noon, and the men quit for the day at 5 p.m., when it was nearly dark at the coal mining season.

When the miners came out of the mine their lard oil lamps were burning, and they were not extinguished until they reached their homes. So the streets were filled with moving lights for a few minutes.

Top wages [wages for aboveground work] then were \$2.50 a day. For work on the bottom, the wages was \$3 a day.

Miners received pay only for the coal that was screened. . . . Wages for screened coal were \$1 per ton for pick coal, 50 cents for machine coal, and nothing for what went through the screen.

Many coal miners walked several miles between their farm homes and the Acme Mine. [The article then gave the names of some of the Acme miners.]

Practically all coal mined then left the mine by railway. Doubleheader engines would haul 18 cars of coal to Semper, then double back for 18 more. The two locomotives would then haul the 36 cars to Denver. At that time the grade around Murphy Hill was steeper than at present. The cars used were mostly of 40,000 pounds capacity.

Coal on the first level of the Acme was worked out, and for a few years the mine was abandoned. Later the shaft was lowered to the second vein and operations were resumed.

In 1890 there were only four coal mines in the vicinity of Louisville – the Acme, the Hecla, the Caledonia and the Ajax. . . . Many people living here at that time said that Louisville would disappear when those four mines were worked out. But the mines are closed, and the town is more substantial than in 1890.

Mine Strikes: The *Rocky Mountain News* and *Denver Post* both reported in the 1890s on mine strikes at the Acme Mine, sometimes involving a few hundred miners from the Acme on a walkout at one time. The purposes were to protest conditions or low pay.

Although the focus of the April 1914 mine strike violence was at the Hecla Mine, where strikebreakers were brought in to keep the mine going, striking Louisville miners at the time of the battle at the Hecla Mine stated that they had intended to set fire to the Acme Mine buildings, according to the 4/29/1914 *Denver Post*. Specific information about whether the Acme Mine was similarly kept open with strikebreakers during the 1910-1914 strike could not be located for this report. However, the answer may be connected to the fact that the Acme Mine complex didn't include a boardinghouse for miners (perhaps because the miners could live so close by in town). Because there was not a boardinghouse at the Acme Mine, there was no separate housing that the mine company could provide to strikebreakers as there was, for example, at the Hecla Mine. However, little is known about the exact status of operations at the Acme during the 1910-1914 strike.

Superintendents: Men who are named in newspaper accounts or records as having been the Acme Mine superintendent or were otherwise significant to its operation are Thomas Carlton, W.H. Bittler, John Hutchinson, William Beamond, and Lewis Wilson. Emanuel Smith was a longtime engineer at the Acme.

Tours of Acme Mine by Others: According to Henry "Rico" Zarini's 1975 oral history interview, high school classes would sometimes tour the Acme Mine and other mines, and even go inside. In addition, a newspaper account in the *Rocky Mountain News* in 1905 described members of women's clubs from Louisville and the state chapter being taken down into the Acme Mine by Superintendent Lewis Wilson for a tour.

The following undated photo shows Superintendent Lewis Wilson and two women wearing miner's caps with carbide lamps next to the Acme Mine. The circumstances are not known. The view is looking east. (This image is part of the mural on the Blue Parrot Restaurant.)

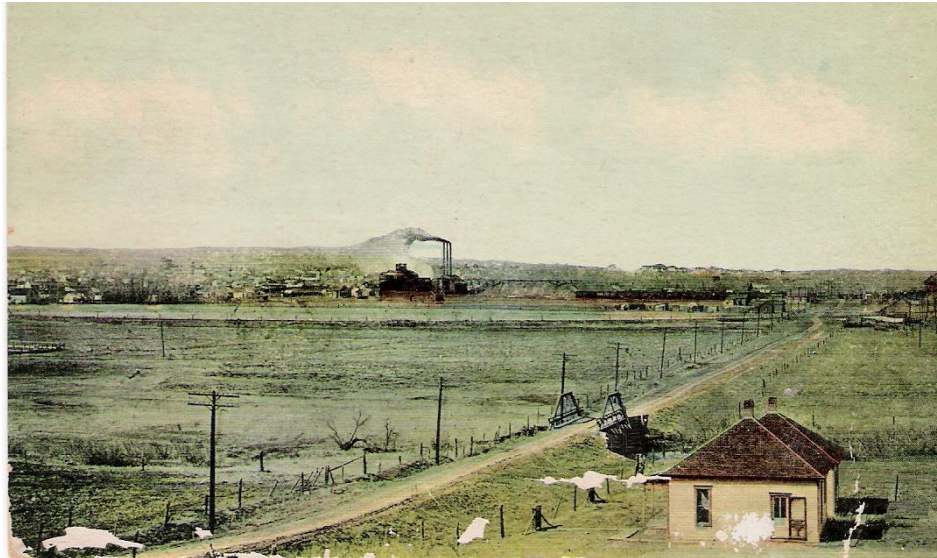


Acme Mine Deaths: At least ten mining deaths took place at this mine, typically in one-person accidents. Five are documented as having occurred in the mine shaft. No records were found that would indicate that any bodies had to be left in the mine. The following miners are documented as having lost their lives in this mine:

- George Isaacs, age unknown, 5/19/1891 – cave-in.
- George McIver, age 28, 12/28/1892 – died after being caught between the hoisting cage and timbers in the mine shaft with Matthew Ransom; a double funeral was held which the Acme miners were allowed to attend.
- Matthew Ransom, age unknown, 12/28/1892 – died after being caught between the hoisting cage and timbers in the mine shaft with George McIver; a double funeral was held which the Acme miners were allowed to attend.
- Mike or Frank Stock, age unknown, 2/21/1894 – cave-in.
- Jacob Charmack or Charnyk, age unknown, 3/27/1895 – cave-in.
- James Craig, age about 46, 4/5/1900 – believed to have killed self by jumping down mine shaft.
- August Risetti, age 26, 11/26/1907 – accidentally fell down mine shaft.
- John “Jack” Smith, age 27, 1/9/1920 – crushed by a derailed coal car.
- John B. Stretz, age 64, 3/9/1926 – cause of death given as “struck by cage,” which likely would have taken place in the mine shaft.
- William Kirk, age 42, 2/5/1928 – cave-in.

Acme Mine Dump: The exceptionally high mine dump was to the east of the tippie, in the middle of what is now Main Street and in the vicinity of what is now the Elks Club parking lot. A trestle went from the tippie to the mine dump. The mine dump was taken down in the early 1930s.

This photo looking north from Murphy Hill by County Road and Coal Creek shows the Acme Mine with its three smokestacks and the large mine dump on the right. Much of the open area shown is now Community Park.



The following photo taken after 1911 has a view looking south and shows the large mine dump in the middle of Main Street.



This undated photo is looking north, up Main Street, from the top of the Acme Mine dump.



The following undated photo shows Jennie Lee with her horse, Gypsy, in front of the Acme Mine. She appears to be standing on Roosevelt. The trestle going over to the mine dump can be clearly seen behind her.



Harry Mayor, who was born in Louisville in 1918, wrote the following about the Acme Mine dump. It appeared in the Spring 2007 *Louisville Historian*.

[Main Street] began on the south at the Acme Mine dump. The dump formed a barrier. It looked to us kids like a major mountain, but it was only about a hundred feet high. You had to take a sharp right or left turn to continue on your way. If you turned right [onto Elm] and then left [onto Roosevelt] you were on the road to Superior and Eldorado Springs.

The road went through a tunnel which supported the track to the mine dump. This track was used to pull a small car to the top of the dump to deposit all the slate, stone, and poor-grade coal that was dug out of the entries and rooms where the miners were working in the tunnels beneath the town.

All the streets in town were “red ash.” The mine dumps always caught fire and burned to this end product. It was a cinder-like material which powdered into a fine red dust or ash. When wet, it hardened into a firm surface and resulted in a surface that prevented the streets from becoming muddy quagmires in winter storms or spring rains.

Harry Mayor also wrote the following for an article entitled “Red Ash Rooster Tails” that appeared in the Fall 2007 *Louisville Historian*. The “rooster tails” he described were the red dust plumes from cars that he could see speeding on roads off in the distance.

The roads and streets in Louisville and other neighboring coal mining towns were covered with layers of “red ash” to serve as the road bed. Red ash was free for the taking from any of the local coal mines. Each mine had a tremendous dump that was the rock, clay, slate, and poor grade coal dug out of the earth and discarded as the “entries” and “rooms” were dug in the quest for saleable lignite and semi-bituminous coal. This coal was the life blood of each town.

The refuse was hauled out of the mine and raised on the hoist to the surface. It was then loaded on a skip and hauled to the top of the dump and released to cascade down the face of the man-made hill. This refuse always caught fire and burned continuously to reduce the mass to a residual red ash. The dump was the bane of our mothers. Dumps were forbidden territory for any kid to explore. But they were fascinating places, and many kids enjoyed the adventure of climbing the dump. However, if your mother ever found out, all hell broke loose. Dire predictions of losing your footing and rolling down the dump through smoke and fire, or breaking your leg or arm (or your fool neck) or falling into a fire hole and being burned alive only heightened the adventure. Each dump was a smoking, smelly cauldron of danger and excitement. Any kid worth his salt explored the dumps in town.

(During the Depression, it was an economic necessity to visit the dumps and collect the stray pieces of coal in gunny sacks to keep the house warm – but that is another story.)

Although the Acme Mine complex with its buildings was fenced, some families with children lived close by and had easy access to the mine dump. Sisters Marion and Lena Tesone, who were born in 1911 and 1912, recalled in a 1995 oral history interview that they grew up at 541 Main and used to watch coal cars come out and “dump the slack” on the “old coal dump,” on Main Street by where the Elks Club was later located. They stated that many Italian children lived on the street and would play street games on Main Street by the mine dump.

According to the February 1997 issue of the *Louisville Historian*, the dump was seen to be burning for many years.

Fire at Acme Mine: A fire in 1927 is said to have destroyed the tibble at the Acme Mine. Two miners working in the bottom of the shaft were pulled out right away, and other miners were able to escape the mine after the fire was extinguished. Since it is known that the Acme ceased operations in 1928, it is possible that a contributing cause of the closure was the destruction of the tibble.

After Closure: After the Acme Mine closed in 1928, the mine dump was finally brought down in July 1933. It had been part of the Louisville landscape for a long time and formed a barrier separating the downtown business district from the south side neighborhoods of Frenchtown (located in the vicinity of Parkview, Rex, and Main) and Kimbertown (located in the vicinity of Roosevelt and Mead). A tongue-in-cheek 1933 article in the *Louisville Times* compared the newly visible neighborhoods of Frenchtown and Kimbertown to two ships: "The S.S. Kimbertown and the S.S. Frenchtown have been lost to view for more than a generation." The article went on to note that fortunately, the ships were finally able to enter the "harbor of Louisville" and moor next to each other at the dock.

The article did not state what became of the Acme Mine dump, which was a mixture of unusable coal, rock, and dirt that had burned down to red ash, but it may have been one of the sources of the red ash that was spread on Louisville's unpaved streets over the years.

According to an article in the February 1997 issue of the *Louisville Historian*, which is believed to have been written by Louisville resident Eileen Harris Schmidt (1927-1998), the location of the Acme Mine "later became the site where traveling shows often camped to present their programs to the people of the town." Similarly, Louisville resident Isabelle Hudson has stated that traveling medicine shows would camp out on the site, which was basically a vacant lot, and present shows there to townspeople who would come and sit on the ground to watch. She and Sylvia Kilker, who grew up on County Road next to the Acme railroad spur, have also stated that the old Acme Mine area was used as a baseball and softball field.

Although the mine dump was taken down, the Acme shaft was an open shaft for many years after the closure of the mine. John Negri, who was born in 1920 and grew up in Louisville, has stated that as a boy and young teen, he would make money by cleaning out ash pits. He and his friends would fill a wheelbarrow with coal ashes from the ash pits in people's back yards and dump the ashes from the wheelbarrow down the Acme Mine shaft. Others recall teenage boys and young men goofing around the Acme Mine shaft and narrowly avoiding serious harm or death. Eventually, the shaft was closed and the ground is now marked with a small seal:



City of L still owns property on Main St. that has as its legal description that it is “Part of Acme Mine Spur.”

Development of the Acme Place and Acme Terrace Subdivisions: Two subdivisions to Louisville were connected with this mine.

In 1893, John Connell, who was one of the initial directors of the Acme Coal Mining Company, acquired property from that company and platted the subdivision of Acme Place. Acme Place can best be described as covering what are now the 500 blocks of Lincoln, Grant, Jefferson, and La Farge Avenues. (Although the 500 and 600 blocks of these streets blend into one another with no cross streets, they were established completely separately and by different developers.) The Acme Place subdivision was only the fourth addition to Original Louisville and was likely developed due to the success of the Acme Mine. The 1909 Drumm’s Wall Map of Louisville shows that the 500 blocks of Lincoln and Grant were well developed with houses by 1909, but the 500 blocks of Jefferson and La Farge, which would have been located quite close to the mine and parts of which were within the fenced enclosure, had few houses at that time.

John Connell’s plat map of Acme Place has the name Acme Avenue instead of Grant Avenue, while Lincoln was to be called Bond Avenue. The name Bond was presumably to honor Isaac L. Bond, a significant financier of the Acme Mine. However, Charles Welch, the developer of the Jefferson Place Addition, had named Jefferson Avenue in 1880 and had thus started the practice of naming the north-south streets for U.S. presidents. When his half-brother, Orrin Welch, in 1894 established the Pleasant Hill Addition to the west of Jefferson Place and to the north of Acme Place, the street names of Grant and Lincoln appeared on the Pleasant Hill plat

map. These names stuck, despite the attempt the year before by Connell to name them Acme and Bond. Although the street names of Bond and Acme didn't survive, the street name of Hutchinson, which first appeared on the Acme Place plat map, did survive.

In 1939, Domenico Staffieri platted the subdivision of the Acme Terrace Addition. He had acquired the land the year before from the Rocky Mountain Fuel Co., the last owner of the Acme Mine. This became part of the 500 block of Main Street and is believed to have included areas that previously had been covered by the Acme mine dump.